

Planning Collaboration Initiative Federal Highway Administration and Federal Transit Administration

Conference Call Summary for March 19, 2003 Topic: Transportation Air Quality Determination

The first round of conference calls for the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and Federal Transit Administration (FTA) Planning Collaboration Initiative (PCI) continued on March 19, 2003 with a discussion of Transportation Air Quality Determination. This was the fifth of fifteen conference calls to discuss the drafting of a National Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between FHWA and FTA. Robin Mayhew of FHWA Headquarters and Vince Valdes of FTA Headquarters facilitated the discussion. Other members of the PCI Team who participated in the conference call included Jesse Balleza from FTA Region 6. Other participants from FHWA Headquarters included Robin Smith (located in Denver, CO), Cecilia Ho, Daniel Wheeler and Abbe Marner with FTA. Volpe Center staff participation included Jeff Bryan, Cassandra Callaway, Kate Fichter, and Esther Lee.

Representatives from the following field offices participated in this fifth call:

- FTA Region 1
- FTA Region 3
- FTA Region 4
- FTA Region 6
- FTA Region 7
- FTA Region 9
- FTA Region 10
- FHWA Alaska Division
- FHWA Arizona Division
- FHWA California Division
- FHWA Florida Division
- FHWA Kansas Division
- FHWA Michigan Division
- FHWA Minnesota Division
- FHWA Mississippi Division
- FHWA North Carolina Division
- FHWA New York Division
- FHWA Pennsylvania Division
- FHWA Tennessee Division
- Washington, DC Metro Office
- Midwestern Resource Center

This summary provides (1) a description of issues and regional differences in transportation air quality determination (2) recommendations for improved efficiency in the process, and (3) a suggested issue to be addressed in future PCI conversations that was not immediately relevant to the discussion on Transportation Air Quality Determination (*see Parking Lot/Bus Stop Issues*).

DISCUSSION OF TRANSPORTATION AIR QUALITY DETERMINATION

The conference call participants discussed the process of coordinating between agencies when making a transportation air quality determination within the planning process. Participants raised the following two issues:

- A. FHWA-Lead Partnership Between Agencies
- B. A Single Signature System

A. FHWA-Lead Partnership Between Agencies

Participants generally agreed that FHWA and FTA are satisfied with the current level of FHWA leadership in air quality determination. FTA regional offices have limited staff responsible for a variety of functions across multiple states, and often do not have the same in-house staff expertise in air quality as their FHWA counterparts. Participants stated that FTA relies heavily on FHWA Division expertise to lead the air quality determination process. The level of FTA involvement in air quality determinations, however, varies across regions.

Examples of the variety of practices used in air quality determination include:

1. In Region 4 and Region 6, FHWA acts as the executive agent, but FTA participates heavily in reviewing and discussing air quality documentation, as well as posing and submitting questions to the state and local Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPO).
2. In New York, an interagency group screens all air quality reviews. Although FTA relies heavily on FHWA for evaluation and modeling procedures, the FHWA-FTA partnership is approximately 60-40 participation. In addition to meeting a minimum of two times a month on quality issues, the interagency group is becoming more involved in the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) process.
3. In North Carolina, the FHWA-FTA partnership also includes EPA and state involvement in air quality determination.
4. In California, FHWA takes the lead for review, documentation, write-up and preparation of the joint letter while FTA signs off on the letter, as defined in a MOU between the FHWA Division and FTA Region 9.

Participants agreed that the process for transferring Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ) funds is shared between the agencies and is working well. When asked why, some participants responded that FTA is more responsive and involved in CMAQ because transit eligibility issues are greater.

An example of a successful practice used in the CMAQ process includes:

1. In New York, FHWA and FTA collaborate often on transit eligibility issues. They have differed on the applicability of CMAQ funds for routine maintenance of subway systems and capacity-enhancements for transit operators, yet negotiated some mutually agreed-upon outcomes.

No recommendations were made to the PCI Team for drafting the National MOU regarding the FHWA-lead partnership or CMAQ process for air quality determination.

B. A Single Signature System

Participants stated that regional differences in the level of involvement by FTA and FHWA affect whether a single signature or joint signature system is more effective for air quality determination. Some participants raised the concern that leaving one signature off would diminish the appearance of equal partnership between agencies.

Examples of the types of agency involvement and signature systems used in air quality determination include:

1. In Region 5, FTA is minimally involved in the air quality determination process, but signs the letter.
2. In Pennsylvania, FTA relies heavily on FHWA for air quality determination; typically, Pennsylvania produces one statewide conformity action. This is accomplished with much help from a state DOT contractor. Transferability of this model would in most situations be dependent on the synchronization of the approval cycle.
3. In Region 6, the FHWA signature on conformity is separate from Surface Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) approval, which is a joint signature. The STIP is based on the MPO's last air quality determination.

The following recommendations were made to the PCI Team regarding the air quality determination:

- Investigate a single signature system, recognizing that one template does not fit each state and region. The National MOU could establish guiding principles related to each of the planning processes and products, with a range of examples for how to meet the guiding principles to address regional diversity.
- Create pilot projects to implement the MOU principles and investigate more ideas.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

The following list restates the recommendations provided in this summary report that relate to air quality determination:

- Investigate a single signature system, recognizing that one template does not fit each state and region. The National MOU could establish guiding principles related to each of the planning processes and products, with different examples of how to meet the guiding principles.
- Create pilot projects to implement the MOU principles and investigate more ideas.

PARKING LOT/BUS STOP ISSUES

The following issue arose during the conference call and should be addressed, but was not immediately relevant to the discussion of transportation air quality determination:

- Participants would like to discuss the question of transferring CMAQ money from FHWA to FTA. Participants indicated that the recent process is more cumbersome than the previous process.